# The many problems in . . .

# IMPROVING TRANSIT

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## A Variety of Problems

*"My train was late again and the air conditioning wasn't working."*

*"They raised the bus fare, but the service didn't get any better."*

*"I'd take a train to work if I could find parking at the station."*

*"My company is moving, but there is no bus service to the new plant."*

There's no denying it. The complaints this Department receives about public transportation are not all just fancied gripes. They come from sincere, well-intentioned citizens who want to see a dramatic improvement in rail and bus service and who ask:

What are you doing about it?

Quite a lot is being done, considering all the problems to overcome.

## Let's look at the railroads first.

There are five privately-owned passenger railroads in New Jersey. All are bankrupt and all are losing money on passenger service. If someone doesn't pay them the money they are losing, they would, by order of the bankruptcy courts, have to go out of the passenger business--there would be no more commuter train service.

Not only would 83,000 people have to find some other way to get to work everyday, but the well-being of the whole State would suffer.

So what's being done about it?

Over the past 12 years, the citizens of New Jersey have contributed more than $100 million--an average of more than $8 million a year--just to keep the passenger trains running, just to buy a basic transportation service.

Obviously, it's not enough to provide only a "basic service." What's needed is improved service--fast, comfortable, convenient--with new cars, dependable equipment, better stations, more parking. All of this is needed to attract more train riders and to achieve a better balance with high-

way transportation in already congested travel corridors!

What's being done about that?

In 1968, New Jersey's voters approved a transportation bond issue that included $200 million for public transportation. Here is what has been, or is being, acquired so far:

260 new passenger coaches, 45 new locomotives, 167 reconditioned passenger cars, the rehabilitation of 53 older passenger coaches, three new railroad stations, and improvements to 34 other stations, including additional park-and-ride spaces.

**All of the 1968 bond money is allocated.**

It will go toward replacing the remaining old passenger cars with new and rehabilitated equipment; electrifying the non-electrified lines so trains from all lines can go into Penn Station, Manhattan; improvements in roadbeds, signal and communications systems and for many more stations. Although all of this 1968 Bond money has not actually been spent as yet, it has been appropriated for these specific purposes and can't be used for anything else.

So, why hasn't it been used? Why the delay?

Which brings us back to the original problem--the bankrupt railroads and their uncertain future. There is the ever-present possibility that a bankrupt railroad may be dissolved and its assets sold to meet the claims of creditors.

The cars and locomotives owned by the State are leased to the railroads for a nominal amount. If a railroad is dissolved, this equipment could be shifted to another line and continue in useful service. But what would become of new railroad track or an electrification system if the trains stop running? Who, in fact, would own the rail and power lines? How can the State protect its investment in such fixed improvements?

These are problems the lawyers have been wrestling with--unsuccessfully so far. Considering the uncertainties, it is highly questionable that such a major investment of taxpayers' money would be a prudent risk with adequate safeguards.

Meanwhile, the search for an answer to these problems also is being pursued through negotiation with the railroads. It is a search in which the accent must be on the positive and the creative.

## Now let's look at the buses.

Incredible though it may seem, there are about 270 bus companies in New Jersey. Each company has a franchise, or license, to operate on certain streets and highways. On some routes as many as 5, 10 and even 15 different companies have permission to pick up passengers. Each one is trying to get a piece of the action.

The result: Practically none is making a real financial go of it.

On the other hand, there are many communities throughout the State with no bus service, no public transportation at all. People are forced to use automobiles when a bus could do just as well and probably at a lower cost. If they don't have a car, they

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just can't get around.

To overcome this problem, the Department began working with the Public Utilities Commission, which controls bus franchises, in an effort to reorganize and improve bus routes throughout the State.

Meanwhile, many bus companies--hit by rising operating costs and a dwindling number of riders--were approaching bankruptcy. Only outside financial help could keep their essential services going. So three years ago, the State started a "holding action" for buses.

In that period 17 bus companies have received a total of $3.2 million in financial aid from the State and the localities which those companies serve. This year, 18 bus companies will receive operating subsidies to continue services which otherwise would be lost to the public.

Again, a "holding action" is not enough. The real need is for new, efficient equipment to cut operating expenses and a reassignment of routes so that buses will run where people need them and will use them.

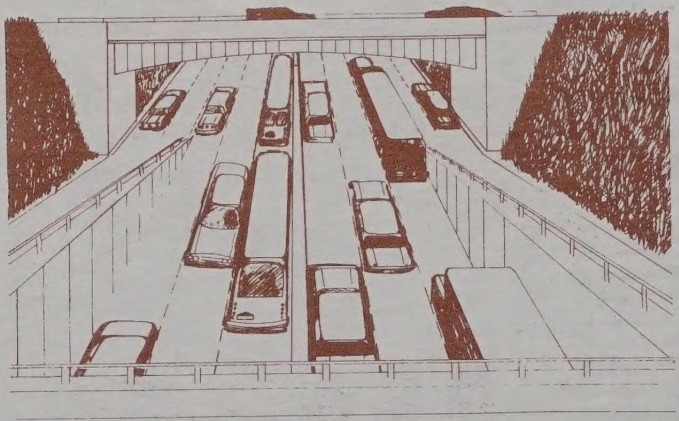
But the bus companies have neither the money to buy new equipment nor the ability on their own to change their franchised routes.

The State, hopefully, is coming to the rescue. First, by replacing outdated, inefficient buses; second, by giving buses a favored position on the highways and thereby improving service; and, third, by reorganizing and consolidating operations so the companies can move away from the brink of bankruptcy.

**Here are some of the efforts under way:**

■ Purchase of the 283 buses owned by the Inter-City group of bankrupt companies and 50 new buses to form an equipment pool from which buses would be leased to a new company, a subsidiary of Transport of New Jersey, the State's largest bus operator. Total cost is estimated at $5.1 million, including $1.7 in 1968 bond funds, with the balance to come from the Federal Govemment.

■ A program to reorganize many of TNJ's bus routes in South Jersey so the buses will serve as feeders to the Lindenwold high speed line. This will benefit both bus and rail transit. A public subsidy to underwrite the changeover is to be provided by appropriation which already has legislative approval.



■ Demonstration projects in which financial and technical assistance is provided to Counties and municipalities for a limited period to find out what proposed bus service makes the most sense.

■ A search for places where buses - and their riders -- could benefit from favored treatment in traffic, including priorities on freeway ramps and lanes for buses only, such as the highly successful exclusive bus lane on the approach to the Lincoln Tunnel.

■ A comprehensive and detailed study to find out what can and must be done to reorganize and revitalize all bus service throughout the State.

**The Department is involved** with many projects to improve passenger railroad and bus services. A lot IS being done to build the system of mass transit New Jersey needs and wants.

And as answers are found to the many legal, financial and technical problems that stand in the way, more will be done, and will be done faster.

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